

EXHIBIT 2  
DATE Feb 5, 09  
HB 10

Committee Members,

With all due respect to those in favor of and testifying for, please consider this opinion from a small Montana County.

In regards to the Interoperability Montana Project known as the I.M., I want to express my opposition to the 2 million dollars requested by the IM in House Bill 10 and respectfully request you oppose this funding request. This Interoperable Public Safety Communications System began in 2004. The Interoperability Montana Project is actually a third attempt at developing a State Wide Radio System for Montana. The desired end product is a Hybrid Trunked Radio System with Microwave Backbone with Mobile Data Capabilities.

There are two important pieces to successful communication. One is technology, which is easy to fix, and the second is interpersonal communications. Interpersonal communications are hard to fix because it involves resolving turf battles between agencies, response discipline, and personalities. The IM Project in the height of its glory will never fix the second part of that equation.

Prior to 2004, DHS funds were allocated to political sub-divisions and tribes within the state of Montana. The counties could spend the DHS funds on communication needs within their own jurisdictions as they saw fit, as long as the expenditures were within the guidance of the Federal Grant. During 2004 local political sub-divisions were advised to form Consortiums with neighboring counties. The goal was to regionalize funding and increase the success rate for grant applications. It was at this point that I, we, Prairie County, and I believe other political sub-divisions felt that they had to belong to a consortium in order to be eligible for DHS Funding. We later learned, and maybe it was just our misunderstanding, that political sub-divisions do not have to belong to the IM in order to apply for DHS Funds. The IM then spent, or at least budgeted, based upon criteria developed by members of the IM. The result has been that a limited number of counties have benefited and at the expense of others in terms of DHS Funding.

The DHS Funds secured by the Interoperability Montana Project, we feel, has benefited a smaller number of jurisdictions in Montana then it could have if locals were able to utilize DHS Funds as they have in the years prior to the forming of Consortia. These are funds that local political jurisdictions could have spent themselves to improve communications in their own back yards, are now unavailable to locals. The money spent on approximately one third of the state, could have improved our

communication capabilities instead of seeing our share of Homeland Security funding going to the I.M. (Interoperability Montana Project.)

The I.M. has secured funding from these and other sources, and a summary of how this money has been spent is outlined below.

1. Homeland Security
2. FEMA Fire Grants
3. Montana Legislative Appropriations
4. Community Oriented Policing Grants
5. Local money
6. Public Safety Interoperability Communications Grants.

These are some of the sources from which funds have been secured for the I.M. Project.

As of January of this year some of these funds have been expended as follows:

**2005 DHS;** budgeted but not spent (3rd Extension) \$1.1 Million Unspent- If an extension is not granted and money is not spent, the money is lost. If the Local counties had access to these funds you can be sure that communications would have been improved. Why do they need more money when they haven't even spent their money from 2005?)

**2006 DHS;** \$1.5 plus Million Unspent

**2007 DHS;** budgeted but not spent.(3.5 to 4 Million Unspent)

**2007 Public Safety Communications Grant (PSIC);** budgeted but not spent and no extension possible.(\$6.5 Million Unspent)

**2007 Montana Legislative Funds (3.5 Million)** appropriated funds, unknown spent

**2008 DHS,** budgeted but not spent.( \$3.1 Million Unspent)

**2008 DHS Interoperable Communication Grant-** (\$242,000 Unspent)

Expense and maintenance for this system was always a concern for Prairie County and others, however the IM never really had an answer. We were told that the I.M. could provide savings through partners, partnering, and cost sharing when we initially signed a user's agreement with a neighboring county. However, when it came time to look at our spot on the I.M. tower, it suddenly became obvious to us that we didn't have a lot of partners to share in costs.

The I.M. is trying to find a long-term sustainability solution and it appears that they would like taxpayers to be an option. A possible future solution would require new taxes, long-term support with State appropriations, and

an increased cost to Counties for System Administrators, Site Managers, and Long-Term maintenance costs.

"I am a taxpayer too." That is something that all public servants need to remind their selves of daily. It certainly appears that although the I.M. has a lot of plans for spending funds, they just can't seem to get the job done. With all of the funds listed above by the I.M. it doesn't make sense for them to ask the State of Montana to give them \$ 2,000,000 of Taxpayer money. More common sense is needed to improve public safety communications in Montana, not taxing the citizens and visitors of Montana. Funding this project may lead to a temporary technological success, but extreme functional failure as the interpersonal link in communications cannot be fixed.

I strongly oppose an increase in state taxes or the use of Montana Taxpayer Money to fund a function that locals were capable of doing themselves. If there are jurisdictions in Montana that have responder safety issues related to communications technology and haven't fixed them because a tower site or repeater is worth more than the jurisdictions personnel, then shame on them! If there are jurisdictions in Montana that did not have communication problems prior to DHS Funds becoming available for communications, then we need to change our focus and see what they were doing prior to September 11, 2001.

Now Montana has this huge project known as the I.M. The I.M. comes with all kinds of unknown expenses, along with an administrative and sustainability that they are still struggling to identify. What if this line in HB 10 passes? How will it have made Montana safer? Being a local responder, administrator and emergency planner, I will submit to you folks that a greater need for a lot of Montana that has been grossly overlooked in all DHS Needs Assessments is more emergency responders. The greatest radio system in the world is worthless without anybody to use it.

Please consider all the money that the I.M. currently has that they cannot get spent. The I.M. has had funding near the \$54,000,000 Million range, and that has covered approximately 30% of the state. This \$54,000,000 is not even spent after 4 years of work. How many years will it take? Will the technology be obsolete if the project does get completed? How will the IM ever be completed if re-fits, updates, mistakes and issues continually require funding? The Montana Highway Patrol has apparently turned to Verizon for its mobile data. Since MHP needs were a big part of the mobile data piece of this project, what purpose will mobile data serve now? Is it already obsolete if a private company (Verizon Wireless) can produce the same, or an even better product for only a monthly fee to the state and without the state having to concern itself with upgrading and maintenance?

Again I submit to you that the great majority of the communication problems that existed on September 11, 2001, continue today, and will continue as long as people chose to not cooperate and work together. These communication issues are the result of years of departmental turf battles and bad blood between departments who CHOOSE to NOT communicate, even during incidents regardless of the magnitude.

Furthermore if you really want to improve public safety communications in Montana, let the locals help themselves. Some sort of guidance as given by the SIEC (Statewide Interoperability Executive Council) would help the locals improve their communication needs, without the huge administrative, bureaucracy, and self-serving needs of the I.M. Project.

Sincerely,

John Pisk, Prairie County Disaster and Emergency Services

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